



## U.S. says new intel shows Russia plotting false flag attack

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — The U.S. accused the Kremlin on Thursday of an elaborate plot to fabricate an attack by Ukrainian forces that Russia could use as a pretext to take military action against its neighbor. Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said the scheme included production of a graphic propaganda video that would show staged explosions and use corpses and actors depicting grieving mourners.

The U.S. has not provided detailed information backing up the claims.

The plan for a fake attack on Russian territory or Russian-speaking people was described in declassified intelligence shared with Ukrainian officials and European allies in recent days.

It was the latest example of the Biden administration divulging intelligence findings as a tactic to attempt to stop Russian disinformation efforts and foil what it says is Russian President Vladimir Putin's effort to lay the groundwork for military action. If Russia does invade, administration officials say they want to make clear Russia had always sought to create a pretext. In recent weeks, the White House has said that U.S. intelligence shows Russia has launched a malign social media disinformation campaign against Ukraine and has dispatched operatives trained in explosives to carry out acts of sabotage against Russia's own proxy forces.

Continued on next page



President Joe Biden waves as he steps off Air Force One upon arrival, at John F. Kennedy Airport, Thursday, Feb. 3, 2022, in the Queens Borough of New York.

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## Continued from Front

Britain has divulged intelligence findings that it says show Russia plotting to install a pro-Russian puppet government in Ukraine.

"We've seen these kinds of activity by the Russians in the past, and we believe it's important when we see it like this and we can, to call it out," Kirby told reporters at the Pentagon.

The administration has repeatedly declined to detail evidence underlying its intelligence findings. State Department spokesman Ned Price said Thursday the administration needed to protect sensitive sources and intelligence gathering methods.

He added "we declassify information only when we're confident in that information."

Meanwhile on Thursday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan offered to mediate talks between Russia and Ukraine, and NATO warned that Moscow's military buildup continues, with more troops and military equipment deployed to neighboring Belarus than at any time in the last 30 years. Erdogan, who has close but sometimes difficult ties with Putin, said Turkey was "prepared to undertake its part in order to end the crisis between two friendly nations that are its neighbors in the Black Sea."

"I have stressed that we would be happy to host a summit meeting at a leadership level or technical level talks," Erdogan said after about three hours of talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. "Instead of fueling the fire, we act with the logical aim of reducing the tensions." Russia has amassed more than 100,000 troops near Ukraine's northern and eastern borders, raising concern that Moscow might invade again, as it did in 2014. The troop presence and uncertainty have un-



**U.S. Army soldiers from the 18th Airborne Division board a C-17 aircraft as they deploy to Europe, Thursday, Feb. 3, 2022 from Fort Bragg, N.C.**

Associated Press

nerved Ukrainians and hurt the country's economy. Russian officials deny that an invasion is planned. Zelenskyy welcomed Erdogan's offer and thanked him for his "firm and consistent" support.

The crisis has put Turkey in a fix, leaving it in a position where it has to balance its growing partnership with Ukraine with its difficult relations with Moscow. Ankara, which has historic ties to Ukraine and ethnic bonds with its Crimean Tatar community, strongly opposed Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea. At the same time, Turkey would be reluctant to join in any sanctions against Russia. With a struggling economy, the country has pinned its hopes on tourism revenue, especially from visitors from Russia. It also relies on Russia for much of its natural gas.

The U.S. said the new intelligence indicates that the Russians would stage military equipment used by Ukraine, including a key weapon supplied by Turkey, a NATO member, to bolster the credibility of a fake attack.

Russia would possibly use Turkish-made Bayraktar drones as part of the fake operation, according to a senior administration official who was not authorized to comment and spoke on the condition of anonymity. The drones have been used by Ukraine against pro-Russia separatists in the Donbas region, a move that angered Moscow, which has made clear it is strongly opposed to Ukraine being equipped with the technology.

Putin and French President Emmanuel Macron spoke again Thursday, their third

call in less than a week. The Kremlin said in a statement that they continued a "detailed dialogue about the situation around Ukraine" and added that Putin drew Macron's attention to "provocative statements and actions" by the Ukrainian leadership.

At NATO headquarters, Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg warned that Russian troop numbers in Belarus are likely to climb to 30,000, with the backing of special forces, advanced fighter jets, Iskander short-range ballistic missiles and S-400 ground-to-air missile defense systems.

"Over the last days, we have seen a significant movement of Russian military forces into Belarus. This is the biggest Russian deployment there since the Cold War," Stoltenberg told reporters.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu was in Minsk on Thursday, checking on preparations for major Russia-Belarus war games scheduled for Feb. 10 to Feb. 20. Shoigu met with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. Speaking about the drills, Lukash-

enko said the goal was "to reinforce the border with Ukraine."

At the same time, Ukraine's defense minister sought again to project calm, saying the probability of an invasion was "low," and he welcomed a change by U.S. officials, who have stopped using the term "imminent" when describing the risk of a Russian attack. Oleksii Reznikov said "the threat exists, the risks exist, but they have existed since 2014, ever since Russia has become an aggressor." He said "there are no grounds for panic, fear, flight or the packing of bags." The minister put the number of Russian troops near Ukraine at 115,000.

Still, Stoltenberg renewed his call for Russia to "de-escalate," and repeated warnings from the West that "any further Russian aggression would have severe consequences and carry a heavy price."

NATO has no intention of deploying troops to Ukraine should Russia invade, but it has begun to reinforce the defenses of nearby member countries — notably Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. The 30-nation military alliance also plans to beef up its defenses in the Black Sea region near Bulgaria and Romania.

In Helsinki, Finnish leaders held talks with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen about a letter that Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov sent to several countries on the "indivisibility of security" in Europe.

Lavrov argues that the U.S. and NATO misunderstand the concept — which essentially means that the security of one European country is linked to the security of them all — and he has demanded replies from countries that signed a key security document encompassing it to clarify the issue.

Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin said there was no "big news" in the letter but that it warranted a reply. Von der Leyen said the commission, the EU's executive branch, will coordinate a response, even though Lavrov insisted that only countries and not organizations should answer. □

# States seek to protect election workers amid growing threats

By LISA RATHKE and CHRIS-TINA A. CASSIDY

Associated Press

MONTPELIER, Vt. (AP) — Lawmakers in a handful of states are seeking greater protections for election officials amid growing concerns for their safety after they were targeted by threats of violence following the 2020 presidential election.

Widespread threats against those who oversee elections, from secretaries of state to county clerks and even poll workers, soared after former President Donald Trump and his allies spread false claims about the outcome of the presidential election. "Corrupt secretaries will all hang when the stolen election is revealed" is just one example of the vitriol that has come from social media, emails and phone messages.

Even in Vermont, where the outcome wasn't disputed, election workers have faced threats. A caller to the secretary of state's office said in 2020 that a firing squad would target "all you cheating (vulgarity)," and "a lot of people are going to get executed."

To counter the threats, lawmakers have introduced bills so far in Vermont and several other states, including Illinois, Maine, New Mexico and Washington, all of which have legislatures controlled by Democrats. Much of the legislation would create or boost criminal liability for threats and, in Illinois, for assaults against election workers.

More legislation is possible, as election officials warn that the ongoing attacks endanger democracy and that many election workers have quit or are considering doing so because of the abuse they have faced since the 2020 election.

"Nationally, we are seeing longtime experienced election leaders and their staffs leaving their positions for other work because they've had it — this is it, this has crossed the line," said Vermont Secretary of State Jim Condos, a Democrat. A survey of local election



Lead by a Georgia State Trooper, Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, center, exits the Georgia State Capitol building after hearing reports of threats, Wednesday, Jan. 6, 2021, in Atlanta.

Associated Press

officials commissioned by the Brennan Center last April found one in three felt unsafe because of their job and one in six said they had been threatened. Trump has continued to promote his false claims that the election was stolen from him, despite no evidence of the type of widespread fraud that would be needed to question the outcome, in which President Joe Biden won by more than 7 million votes.

One bill under consideration in Vermont would expand the definition of criminal threatening to make it easier to prosecute those acts. Another would heighten the penalty for the criminal threatening of election officials, public employees and public servants.

During a recent legislative committee hearing, Condos described how the threatening calls had scared one staffer to the point that he was afraid to leave work and walk to his vehicle. He eventually took time off and sought counseling for symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress.

"No election official should ever need to fear for their life for their role in serving our country's democracy in this or any election," Con-

dos said.

A bill in Maine would make threats against election officials a class C felony, after threats to two local clerks in 2021.

"The message has to be loud and clear that this is a threat to our democracy," said Democratic Rep. Bruce White, the sponsor. "Threatening people who work our elections is entirely unacceptable."

In the immediate aftermath of the 2020 election, New Mexico Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver, a Democrat, left her home for weeks as a safety precaution in response to security concerns. A Democrat-sponsored bill introduced last month expands the felony crime of intimidation to include acts against employees and agents of the secretary of state, county clerks and municipal clerks. Supporters of the legislation said expanding protections to all election office workers is important because threats haven't been limited to top-level staff.

In Fulton County, Georgia, two election office workers — one a temporary employee — filed a lawsuit in December against a conservative website, accusing it of spreading false stories about them.

Their lawsuit said the false

can, and sending sexualized threats to Raffensperger's wife.

At the federal level, an election threats task force within the U.S. Department of Justice has reviewed more than 850 reports of threats to election officials, Assistant Attorney General Kenneth Polite said. Two people have been charged with federal crimes for threatening election workers, including a Texas man charged with threatening to kill government officials in Georgia after the 2020 election. Polite said the department also has dozens of open investigations.

Arizona Secretary of State Katie Hobbs, a Democrat, said it's imperative that harassers face prosecution.

"Unless people are held accountable, this kind of behavior is going to continue," she said.

In October, a congressional committee heard from election officials about graphic threats to their safety since the 2020 election.

Legislation also was introduced by a group of Democrats in the U.S. Senate last year that would make it a federal crime for any person to intimidate or threaten an election worker. It became part of a larger effort by Democrats to create federal standards for voting and restore a key provision of the Voting Rights Act. □

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## As winter storm moves across U.S., ice becomes bigger concern

By KATHLEEN FOODY and  
JILL BLEED

**Associated Press**

**CHICAGO (AP)** — More than 200,000 homes and businesses lost power across the U.S. on Thursday as freezing rain and snow weighed down tree limbs and encrusted power lines, part of a winter storm that caused an apparent tornado in Alabama, dumped more than a foot of snow in parts of the Midwest and brought rare measurable snowfall to parts of Texas.

Storm conditions also caused headaches for travelers across the country as airlines canceled more than 6,000 flights scheduled for Thursday or Friday in the U.S. At Dallas-Fort Worth Airport, authorities shut down all runways Thursday morning and reported more than 1,000 canceled flights. The highest totals of power outages blamed on icy or downed power lines were concentrated in Tennessee, Arkansas, Texas and Ohio, but the path of the storm stretched further from the central U.S. into the South and Northeast on Thursday.

Heavy snow was expected from the southern Rockies to northern New England, while forecasters said heavy ice buildup was likely from Texas to Pennsylvania. "We have a lot of real estate covered by winter weather impacts this morning," Andrew Orrison, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in College Park, Maryland, said early Thursday. "We do have an expansive area of heavy snow, sleet and freezing rain occurring."

Parts of Ohio, New York



Men play football on a soccer field in Chicago's Lincoln Park Wednesday, Feb. 2, 2022.

Associated Press

and northern New England were expected to see heavy snowfall as the storm moves to the east with 12 to 18 inches (30 to 45 centimeters) of snow possible in some places through Friday, Orrison said.

Along the warmer side of the storm, strong thunderstorms capable of damaging wind gusts and tornadoes were possible Thursday in parts of Mississippi and Alabama, the Storm Prediction Center said.

In western Alabama, several homes were damaged and people were injured and trapped following an apparent tornado in rural Hale County, Emergency Management Director Russell Weeden told WBMA-TV. The National Weather Service issued several tornado warnings in the region as a line of storms moved through.

Tornadoes in the winter are unusual but possible,

and scientists have said the atmospheric conditions needed to cause a tornado have intensified as the planet warms.

Heavy snow the storm brought to Midwestern states isn't unusual, except the bigger than normal path of intense snow in some places, said Northern Illinois University meteorology professor Victor Gensini. With a warmer climate, people are forgetting what a Midwestern winter had long been like, he said.

"The only amazing winters I've been able to experience is through my parents' photographs of the 1970s," Gensini, who is 35, said. "This (storm) is par for the course, not only for the past, but winters current."

More than 20 inches (51 centimeters) of snow was reported in the southern Rockies, while more than a foot of snow fell in areas of Illinois, Indiana and Michigan.

gan.

The flight-tracking service FlightAware.com showed more than 6,000 flights in the U.S. scheduled for Thursday or Friday had been canceled, on top of more than 2,000 cancellations Wednesday as the storm began. Sleet and freezing rain were occurring early Thursday in the Dallas-Fort Worth area and in parts of Oklahoma and Arkansas. More than 200,000 homes and businesses were without power, mostly in Texas, Tennessee and Arkansas, according to the website poweroutage.us, which tracks utility reports.

"Unfortunately we are looking at enough ice accumulations that we will be looking at significant travel impacts," Orrison said.

Tennessee had the highest number of reported power outages by midday, particularly in Memphis and

surrounding areas in West Tennessee.

Trees sagged under the weight of ice in Memphis, resulting in fallen tree limbs and branches. Parked cars had a layer of ice on them and authorities in several communities around the city warned of some cars sliding off slick roadways.

In Texas, the return of sub-freezing weather brought heightened anxiety nearly a year after February 2021's catastrophic freeze that buckled the state's power grid for days, leading to hundreds of deaths in one of the worst blackouts in U.S. history.

Facing a new test of Texas' grid, Republican Gov. Greg Abbott said it was holding up and on track to have more than enough power to get through the storm. Texas had about 70,000 outages by Thursday morning, nowhere close to the 4 million outages reported in 2021.

Abbott and local officials said Thursday's outages were due to high winds or icy and downed transmission lines, not grid failures.

In Dallas, where snow rarely accumulates, the overnight mix of snow and freezing rain had hardened Thursday afternoon into an icy slick that made roads perilous.

South Bend, Indiana, reported a record snowfall for the date on Wednesday with 11.2 inches (28.5 centimeters), eclipsing the previous record of 8 inches (20.3 centimeters) set on the date in 1908, said Hannah Carpenter, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service's office in Syracuse, Indiana. □

## Ex-Navy captain pleads guilty in massive bribery case

**SAN DIEGO (AP)** — A former U.S. Navy captain pleaded guilty to bribery Wednesday for accepting nearly \$68,000 in dinners, hotels, parties and prostitutes from a Malaysian defense contractor, prosecutors said.

Donald Hornbeck, who entered the plea in San Diego federal court, acknowledged that while directing operations of combat ships in the 7th Fleet in the Western Pacific,

he benefited Leonard Francis by steering ships to ports for service by the contractor's Singapore-based company. Hornbeck also acknowledged that he shared confidential Navy information with Francis, according to a statement from the U.S. attorney's office.

Hornbeck is one of 34 Navy officials and defense contractors, including Francis, accused of a fraud and bribery scheme that among

other things provided Glenn Defense Marine Asia with classified ship schedules, allowing them to beat competitors and overcharge for services.

Twenty-nine defendants have pleaded guilty.

The scheme cost the Navy some \$35 million.

"While scores of Navy officials were partying with Leonard Francis, a massive breach of national secu-

rity was in full swing," U.S. Attorney Randy Grossman said in a statement. "Today another participant has admitted that he lost his way, allowing greed to replace honor and duty as the driving force in his life."

Hornbeck, 61, of Greenfield, Indiana, is scheduled to be sentenced in September. He could face up to 15 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. □

# EU nations debating borders, migration policies

By SYLVIE CORBET and LORNE COOK

**LILLE, France (AP)** — European Union interior ministers on Thursday were debating ways to beef up the 27-nation bloc's borders, including by erecting walls or fences, and examine yet again how to kick-start desperately needed reforms to the EU's malfunctioning asylum system.

The EU has been mired in a deep political crisis since well over 1 million people, many of them refugees fleeing war in Syria, began entering in 2015. Greece was overwhelmed by migrants landing on its islands on rafts and dinghies from Turkey. Other countries were slow or reluctant to help.

The old asylum system, based on the notion that the country where migrants first arrive must deal with them, collapsed. New reform proposals have failed to overcome the fundamental problem who should take responsibility and what kind of help other countries should provide.

France, which currently holds the EU's rotating presidency, is trying to reenergize the sweeping reform plan by tackling parts of it at a time.

French President Emmanuel



European Union ministers for justice and the interior participate in a meeting, Thursday, Feb. 3, 2022 in Lille, northern France.

Associated Press

Macron on Wednesday evening met with the interior ministers in a push to "move the issue forward." Macron acknowledged members states have different views depending on their geographic situation and warned against divisions.

He proposed the creation of a new body, the Schengen Council, that would gather members of the free-passport area to make decisions on migration policies, including preventing difficulties and bringing a

quick response in case of crisis.

European Commission Vice President Margaritis Schinas said Thursday "there can be no migration policy at the European level without a significant dimension of border management."

"We are now working to accelerate our agreement" on both external borders issue and the asylum system at talks in Lille, northern France, he added.

French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said he wants all member states

to "show support" toward nations where migrants first arrive whether they are Mediterranean or Eastern European countries.

"They see sometimes massive arrivals of refugees because of the geopolitical instability of the world," he stressed.

"The idea is to understand difficulties of countries of first entry" in the EU and show "full solidarity" via relocating asylum seekers in other countries or helping them financially. In exchange, they must "record

all foreigners who arrive on our soil," he said.

So far, talk has tended to focus on outsourcing the EU's migrant challenges to the countries that people leave or transit to get to Europe and on beefing up borders.

In Lille, the ministers will pick over new proposals to respond to what have been dubbed "hybrid attacks" using migrants, after Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko invited thousands of people, many of them Iraqis, to Belarus with the promise of helping them to enter Europe.

Lithuania and Poland, notably, are working on border barriers to keep people out, and have also changed their national asylum rules to make it harder for people to stay. The EU's executive branch, the European Commission, has made a series of proposals that countries can use in an emergency.

In a document laying out national positions on the proposals, which has been seen by The Associated Press, a strong minority of countries favor the use of walls or fences to stop people entering, and some argue that EU money should be used to pay for the barriers. □

## U.S. gives military helicopters to Croatia, Russia arms Serbs

**ZAGREB, Croatia (AP)** —

The United States on Thursday delivered two Black Hawk military helicopters to Croatia, which is engaged in a mini arms race with neighboring Russian ally Serbia amid simmering tensions in the post-war Balkan region.

The U.S. Embassy in Croatia's capital, Zagreb, said the donated UH-60M multi-purpose helicopters will contribute to Croatia's growing defense capabilities and military preparedness in support of NATO.

"The Black Hawk provides capabilities across a range of possible missions, from special operations to tactical troop transport to aero-medical evacuation," U.S.

Chargé d'Affaires Mark Fleming said as the helicopters arrived on a U.S. Air Force transport plane to Zagreb.

"Croatia has earned a reputation as a committed and capable NATO ally, and the introduction of Black Hawks will further boost the capacities of the Croatian Armed Forces," Fleming said in the statement.

Defense Minister Mario Banovic thanked the U.S. for the donation.

"It represents evidence of strong, friendly and allied relations, which are progressing every year," he said.

Croatia last month reached an agreement

with the U.S. to buy 89 Bradley fighting vehicles as part of cooperation with Washington and plans as a member of NATO to form an infantry brigade.

Croatia, which is also a member of the European Union, last year agreed to purchase 12 Rafale fighter jets from France.

Serbia, which was at war with Croatia in the 1990s over its secession from the Serb-led Yugoslavia, has lately been arming itself mostly with Russian and Chinese warplanes, drones, and anti-aircraft systems.

In recent months, Russia has handed over to Serbia 30 battle tanks and 30 armored personnel carriers.



A view of UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters carrying U.S. and Afghan trainees take off at Kandahar Air Field, in Afghanistan, Monday, March 19, 2018.

Associated Press

Serbia has also recently purchased sophisticated Russian Pantsir air defense systems, as well as attack and transport helicopters and Chinese drones. □

## Aussies say James Cook's ship was found, U.S. says not so fast

**SYDNEY (AP) —** Australian maritime experts said Thursday they believed they've found the wreck of one of the most important ships in the history of the South Pacific after it was scuttled in the U.S. more than 200 years ago.

But archaeologists in the U.S. quickly countered by saying the findings were premature and a breach of contract in their joint research.

For 22 years, maritime archaeologists have been investigating several ancient shipwrecks in a 2-square-mile area of Newport Harbor, Rhode Island. That's where James Cook's HMS Endeavour was believed to have been deliberately sunk by the British during the American Revolution. Cook had earlier sailed the ship around the South Pacific in a pioneering voyage before landing on the east coast of Australia in 1770.

On Thursday morning, Kevin Sumption, the chief executive of the Australian National Maritime Museum, held a news conference in Sydney after alerting media that he'd be making "a major historic maritime announcement."

Sumption said archaeolo-



A replica of the ship the Endeavour is at anchor in Botany Bay, Sydney, April 17, 2005.

Associated Press

gists were convinced they had found the wreck of the Endeavour after matching structural details and the shape of the remains to those on original plans.

"I am satisfied that this is the final resting place of one of the most important and contentious vessels in Australia's maritime history," Sumption said.

But in a statement issued soon afterward, D.K. Abbass, the executive director of the Rhode Island Marine Archaeology Project, said her group was the lead or-

ganization in the study at Newport Harbor.

"What we see on the shipwreck site under study is consistent with what might be expected of the Endeavour, but there has been no indisputable data found to prove the site is that iconic vessel, and there are many unanswered questions that could overturn such an identification," Abbass wrote. "When the study is done, RIMAP will post the legitimate report."

In a subsequent interview with the Australian Broad-

casting Corporation, Kieran Hosty, the Australian museum's manager of maritime archeology, said he thought his group's contract with RIMAP had ended in November but he couldn't comment for certain. He gave further details that he said had convinced them it was the Endeavour, including the size of the timbers, that it was European-built, and the scuttling holes in the keel. "So it tick all those boxes," Hosty told the ABC. "So, we are very open to conversa-

tions with Dr. Abbass if she disagrees with our findings, their findings."

Sumption had earlier said that the ship's significant role in exploration, astronomy and science made it important not only to Australia, but also to New Zealand, Britain and the U.S.

"The last pieces of the puzzle had to be confirmed before I felt able to make this call," Sumption said at the news conference. "Based on archival and archaeological evidence, I'm convinced it's the Endeavour." Only about 15% of the vessel remains and researchers are now focused on what can be done to protect and preserve it, Sumption said at the news conference. □

He said that the museum was working closely with maritime experts in Rhode Island as well as with state and federal officials in the U.S. and Australia to secure the site.

But Abbass said that while her organization recognized the connection between Australian citizens of British descent and the Endeavour, its conclusions would be driven "by proper scientific process and not Australian emotions or politics." □



The sun rises over the headquarters of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Co. headquarters that dominates the skyline in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, Nov. 7, 2016.

Associated Press

**By AYA BATRAWY**  
**Associated Press**

**DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) —** Abu Dhabi's state-owned oil and gas company announced Thursday the discovery of between 1.5 to 2 trillion standard cubic feet of raw gas in an offshore area

located in the emirate's northwest.

The discovery comes as Gulf Arab states continue to rely heavily on profits from oil and gas exports, despite rising global temperatures and climate change from burning fossil fuels. The United Arab Emirates, where

## Abu Dhabi's ADNOC announces a new offshore gas find

Abu Dhabi is capital, was the first Gulf Arab state last year to join other countries around the world in pledging "net-zero" emissions targets within its borders while maintaining fossil fuel exports abroad.

The Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, also known as ADNOC, said the discovery came about in partnership with a consortium led by Italy's Eni and Thailand's PTT Exploration and Production Company Limited, which were awarded concession rights in the area. The 2019 agreement saw Eni and PTTTEP vowing to invest \$230 million to explore for oil and gas and appraise existing discoveries in two blocks spanning a total of 8,000

square kilometers (3,000 miles).

For their natural gas discovery, the companies relied in part on insights from a massive 3D seismic survey underway in Abu Dhabi, according to ADNOC.

ADNOC Managing Director and CEO Sultan Ahmed al-Jaber hailed the discovery. He said it speaks to the company's commitment to partnerships that help Abu Dhabi explore and develop its untapped hydrocarbon resources.

In December, ADNOC announced the discovery of up to 1 billion barrels of oil in another block of Abu Dhabi.

The U.S. Energy Information Agency cites figures esti-

mating the UAE holds the seventh-largest proven reserves of natural gas in the world at over 215 trillion cubic feet.

The country, which lies on the eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula along the Persian Gulf, has some 98 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, with about 96% of that located in Abu Dhabi. The United Arab Emirates is among the world's 10 largest oil producers, with most of the country's oil and gas wealth concentrated in Abu Dhabi.

Despite its large natural gas fields, the UAE also imports natural gas due to its extensive domestic use in operating power plants and desalination plants. □

## U.S. to modernize, speed up work on Puerto Rico power grid

By DÁNICA COTO

Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP)

— Three federal agencies promised Wednesday to help modernize Puerto Rico's outage-plagued power grid and speed up efforts to strengthen it more than four years after Hurricane Maria razed it.

More than \$12 billion in federal recovery funds are available, and a portion of that will help finance dozens of grid modernization projects scheduled to start this year, said the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which signed the agreement with Puerto Rico's government along with the U.S. departments of Homeland Security and Energy.

In addition, more than \$1.9 billion will be used to improve the island's power system, including the creation of small and large microgrids with the aim to help lower income households.

Officials said more than 130 projects soon will be in the bidding phase or under construction, including repairs to substations across Puerto Rico, the replacement of thousands of street



Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority workers repair distribution lines damaged by Hurricane Maria in the Cantera community of San Juan, Puerto Rico, Oct. 19, 2017.

Associated Press

lights and the creation of an early warning system for dams.

The announcement comes as Puerto Rico's Electric Power Authority struggles to emerge from bankruptcy and restructure some \$9 billion in debt as power outages continue to hit the U.S. territory of 3.2 million people, with many worried about the state of the grid four months before the

Atlantic hurricane season starts.

"It's very much needed," said Cathy Kunkel, energy program manager for CAMBIO, a Puerto Rico-based environmental organization. "The electrical system is still very fragile and there are a lot of problems with blackouts."

The agreement signed with the U.S. territory also aims to lessen Puerto Rico's depen-

dence on petroleum, with the island's power company slated to sign contracts for at least 2 gigawatts of renewable energy and 1 gigawatt of energy storage projects. Officials said Puerto Rico is finalizing negotiations on several initial projects, including one that would provide 844 megawatts of renewable energy and 220 megawatts of energy storage.

The deal also marks the launch of a two-year study funded by the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency that will include public participation to help determine the best way for Puerto Rico to reach 40% renewable energy by 2025 and 100% renewable energy by 2050, a priority of the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden.

Kunkel praised those efforts, adding that her organization commissioned a study that found Puerto Rico can realistically reach 75% renewable energy by 2035.

"It's absolutely feasible," she said in a phone interview. "It's a question of politics."

She noted Puerto Rico's outdated generation system is 97% based on fossil fuels.

The deal also calls for the U.S. Energy Department and one of its laboratories to develop a tool ahead of the June 1 start of the hurricane season combining models of Puerto Rico's electric system and hurricane forecasting to help the island prepare for storms and speed up emergency response, officials said. □

## Mexico plans state lithium company, questions Chinese mine

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico's president said Wednesday he will create a state-owned company to mine lithium and appeared to suggest he will seek to cancel one of the few existing permits held by a Chinese company.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador had said in October that he wants to declare lithium a "strategic mineral" and reserve future exploration and mining to the government. Lithium is a key component of batteries.

It hadn't been clear if he would rely on private companies to do the work, which Mexico has no experience in. But López Obrador said Wednesday that a newly created government company will do the mining and processing.

The president also said a

private lithium mine in the northern state of Sonora that involves a Chinese company would not be allowed to start production. "What they want to do is to continue looting and that is over. We are going to take legal steps," López Obrador said.

Asked specifically if that meant the mine would be blocked from operating, López Obrador said, "Lithium is going to be mined by the government." That operation, Bacanora Lithium, is Mexico's only viable private lithium mine, and had been expected to start production in 2023. It is currently owned by Chinese lithium giant Gafeng International.

In October, Interior Secretary Adán López Hernández had said the eight concessions for mining lithium

already granted in Mexico would be respected as long as they were well on the way to producing the metal. López Hernández said at the time that only one private mining company met those criteria. Though he didn't name the mine, he apparently referred to Bacanora Lithium, a project hoping to produce 35,000 tons of lithium annually starting in 2023.

López Obrador suggested the concession was illegally granted by a previous administration, saying that "this warrants an investigation into who gave these permits, this authorization." The declaration of lithium as a "strategic mineral" reserved for the state must still be adopted. The change is contained in legislation that López Obrador has sent to Congress that also would



Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador gives his daily, morning news conference at the presidential palace, Palacio Nacional, in Mexico City, Dec. 18, 2020.

Associated Press

change Mexico's constitution to strengthen government control over electricity production and distribution. It requires a two-thirds majority in both houses of Congress and a majority of state legislatures. The bill would eliminate

much of the framework of private sector openings in Mexico's electrical power market, giving the state-owned utility a guarantee majority market share and allowing it to buy power from private plants if it so chooses. □



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**Our happy island is the perfect place to relax and rejuvenate mind, body and soul**

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of your overall health, and getting some serious shut-eye support both physical and mental wellbeing is much needed.

Walk hand in hand with your partner on the beach to experience the benefits of touch. In addition to making your heart happy, research has shown that hand holding and hugs can help lower your blood pressure. It's the perfect time to revive the love between the two of you.

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**Valentine's Day is the celebration of love, beauty and romantic mood between couples and/or friends. While enjoying your stay in Aruba you can make this day extra special by surprising your love with the help of Aruba Today.**

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Short message

Send your selected picture (high resolution JPEG) with a short personal Valentine message (maximum 40 words)

### Love Story

Send us your Love Story to share with our readers! Tell us how long you've been together, how you've met, what makes your relationship special and some tips for a long and happy relationship.

### What Will We Do?

We will publish your picture and message in the local section of Aruba Today on Monday February 14 in our printed newspaper and on our website and Facebook page. Send it by email at [news@arubatoday.com](mailto:news@arubatoday.com) by latest Friday February 11.

Make her/him smile on this special day, do something different! □

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## Covid Status in Aruba as of Feb 03, 2022

ORANJESTAD – Here is the latest update on the ongoing COVID situation in Aruba. As of February 3 2022, Aruba registered 257 active cases, of which 49 were non-residents. Whereas the average daily cases over the past seven days total 89. The positivity rate stands at 44%.

### Hospitalizations:

There are currently 23 hospitalized of which 3 are in the iCU. In Colombia there are 6 persons in ICU. Due to lack of staff at the hospital they have to send patients over to Colombia for treatment.

The measures are as follows since of December 30, 2021 Curfew: NO Curfew

Closing Time: 12:00 am for all business for the exception of Casino's which can stay open till 1:00 am

Restaurants: Max. 6 people per table.

Social Activities and Sports: Max. people: 60 indoors, 75 outdoors.

Funerals: Max. people: 75 (if the space is adequately large enough)

Area Ban 7:00 pm – 5:00 am

Nightlife: Dancing is not permitted

Entertainment: Max 5 musicians on stage.

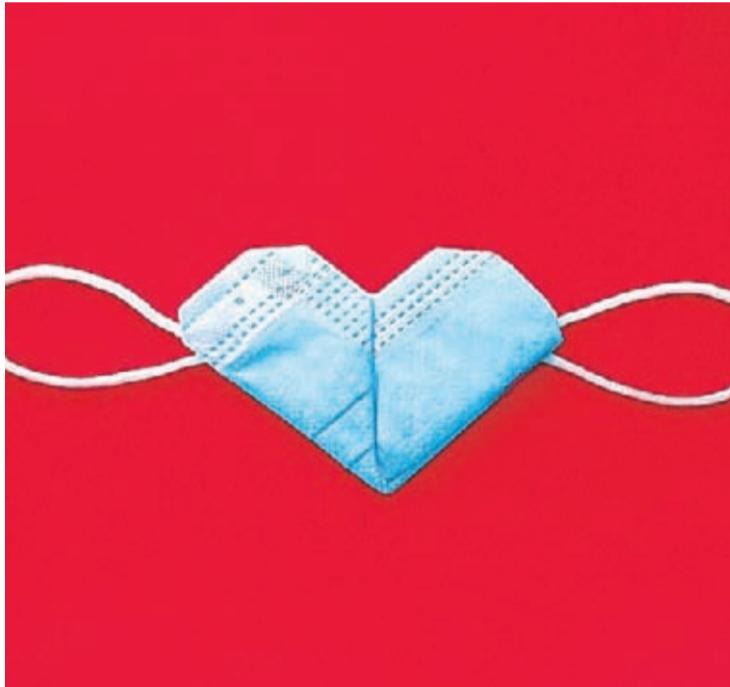
Gathering Ban: Max. 6 people.

Shopping: 1 person per family

The following measures remain applicable:

Masks: Use of masks is mandatory inside at all establishments.

Alcohol: Ban of alcohol on



public roads: 24 hours.

Social Distancing: Continue maintaining social distance.

Exceptions since Jan 8, 2022

Persons that have received the booster shot (so all 3 vaccine shots) and persons that were infected with Covid within past 4 weeks no longer need to quarantine when a housemate tested positive.

Adaptation of testing requirements to enter Aruba As of February 3, 2022, non-resident travelers visiting Aruba have two testing options before boarding.

- A PCR test is taken per the country of origin's risk level;

- An Antigen lab-test within 24 hours of travel

You must upload the test results online on the ED card system. The introduction of the Antigen option

facilitates the entire testing process travelers have to go through and makes it possible for more visitors to get their test results in time for their Aruba vacation. This option contributes to the growth of our tourism without increasing the risks of more covid infections. Travelers from high-risk countries still cannot test upon arrival but must show a negative PCR result before boarding.

- Residents returning from the USA can get a (PCR) test at the airport upon arrival but can now also get an Antigen test within 24 hours of travel from the US.

- Those who wish to do a Molecular (e.g. PCR) test will have 3 days to take the Molecular test

- Aruba will be opening up to all countries

Aruba launched the option to travel with a digitally verifiable QR-Code proof of Covid-19 booster vacci-

nation. Any combination of the following vaccines and booster shot administered at least 7 days before travel will be accepted:

- Comirnaty (Pfizer BioNTech),
- Spikevax (Moderna),
- Vaxzevria (AstraZeneca),
- Janssen (Johnson & Johnson),
- Nuvaxovid (Novavax).

This needs to be uploaded as part of the ED Card process no earlier than 3 days before arrival. If you can't scan the QR you will be

able to upload a picture of the vaccination card but this must be as clear as possible and also with all details showing.

For the U.S.: Please take note that neither the physical nor a picture of the CDC card will be accepted, it needs to be in the form of a SMART Health Card.

For more details go to [www.aruba.com](http://www.aruba.com) traveler requirement.□

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## Making a diversified economy in the Caribbean flourish

by Cdr. Bud Slabbaert

**Two simple questions right of the bat. Does the country consume more than it produces? Does the country import more than it exports? The answer to those questions will show that there is an imbalance. And the third question that automatically follows is: 'where do we go from here?' There is a just as simple answer for that: 'diversify the economy and the country will flourish'.**

That is where the dilemma begins. Actually, the problem itself is not the diversification. It is the many opinions that try to shoot so many holes in whatever is suggested for diversification, that even Swiss cheese looks like a solid mass. And yet, that is even the worst. The worst is that no realistic solutions are brought forward in the first place and if..., then there is no serious follow-up.

For most of the Caribbean territories, tourism is the major source of revenue, up to about 85%. Please pardon my French but anything over 50% is insane. Economic diversification is the process of shifting an economy away from a single income source toward multiple sources from a growing range of sectors and markets. It is applied as a strategy to encourage positive economic growth and development.

It doesn't mean at all to give up tourism. Don't try to pull that one as a counterargument. Diversification shall be a distinct art to unite while leaving all differences intact. Adding lines of business that are different from the current is the development strategy which in some cases may complement each other.

Where does the logic all start? Maybe by making a list of all items, be it products or services that are imported. Which of those items could be produced locally? Could alternative products be produced locally and be marketed as



'authentic' to give it extra value? Can these locally produced items be exported. Authenticity could again give it more value and make it competitive when exported. By following this path of increased production, also employment could be boosted. Now we're talking business, and this talking business does not just give workers something to do, but also people with more extensive skills like managers, administrators and marketers.

Not all imports can be eliminated and that is not the purpose of this exercise. However, it may create what is called a 'trade balance' between import and export. It will have the monetary advantage that more money stays in the country and can increase the wealth of the population, not to forget that it will benefit the government coffers. A healthy and flourishing economy.

Does it hurt tourism activities? No, it doesn't, and that wasn't the purpose either. Some of the locally

produced items can be used by the tourism and hospitality industry. It is just about creating additional business of a third kind and create a balance of at least 50/50 as for where the revenue of the economy comes from.

Does it need academics and consultants that cost a lot of money and taking three months to come up with a conclusion? No. There is no need for lengthy studies that use expressions that many don't understand anyway and contain long paragraphs with chapters like 'focusing on strategies to..', 'addressing the achievement of..', 'implementation of..', 'establishment of..', 'fostering the development of..', 'instigating...', etc. Baloney, it just takes some local bright impartial minds in the community and maybe a leader who can say: "I love it when a plan comes together!"

To summarize it, this is about eliminating a problem by pinpointing exactly where there's an opportunity. The



tourism industry has its proven vulnerabilities. Diversification creates opportunities. Vulnerabilities require the ability to counter and to withstand shocks which is called resilience. Diversification increases resilience. Diversification brings competitive advantages and allows to reduce business risk. It does not only strengthen the local economy, but it also enhances the community's quality of life. It creates employment and better paid jobs. It motivates young people.

So, what in the world does it need to get started? Protein bars? A strike of lightning? A pressure cooker? When an economy is like an old battery, it needs new generators to charge

it up. It needs fresh thinking by local bright people that have common sense and who start by making a list of all items, be it products or services, that are imported but can be produced locally and then follow the line of thinking as described above. They can make a diversified economy in the Caribbean flourish.

### About:

Cdr. Bud Slabbaert is the Chairman and Coordinator of the Caribbean Aviation Meetup, an annual results and solution oriented conference for stakeholders of 'airlift' in the Caribbean. Mr. Slabbaert's background is accentuated by aviation business development, strategic communication, and journalism. □

## Swing shift: Wall Street's gyrations no cause for surprise

By STAN CHOE  
AP Business Writer

**NEW YORK (AP)** — What a wild ride. The stock market hasn't been this crazy since...a couple years ago. Yes, stocks have swerved scarily this year as Wall Street comes to grips with a Federal Reserve no longer doing everything it can to prop up markets. The average day last month saw a swing twice as wide for the S&P 500, from its low point to its high, as a year earlier. In one dizzying day, it careened from a 4% loss to a small gain.

Perhaps more jarring was that the S&P 500 flirted repeatedly with a 10% drop from its record set on the first trading day of the year. It's a cold slap for the millions of people who got their first taste of investing in recent years. Until the last few weeks, anyone who began dabbling in the market after March 2020 had known a time where stocks pretty much only went up.

The recent shakiness, though, shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone. This is what stocks do, and it's the price that investors have paid for their historically strong returns over the long term.

That 4% swing in one day last month? In 2020, when the pandemic first struck, investors saw 20 such stomach-churning days. In 2008, during the throes of the financial crisis, there were



Pedestrians walk past the New York Stock Exchange in New York's Financial District, on March 23, 2021. Associated Press

49 such days, according to S&P Dow Jones Indices. That's an average of four every month.

And a 10% drop for the S&P 500 isn't a rare thing either. They tend to happen every couple years or so, with 23 of them over the last 50 years. Last month's swoon didn't even count as one of them, because the S&P 500 has yet to close a trading day at least 10% below its record. It's come close, but each time it pulled upward enough at the end of the day to stay above that threshold.

Why would anyone put themselves through such

tumult? Because stocks have proved to be some of the best investments for the long term, as long as an investor can hang on through the volatility and resist the temptation to sell. After every major downturn for U.S. stocks, from the Great Depression to the 2000 dot-com bubble to 2008's near-collapse of the financial system, the market has eventually gone on to recover all its losses and mark new peaks.

Following each of the S&P 500's drops of at least 10% over the last 50 years, it's climbed an average of 83% in the ensuing five

years, according to Robert W. Baird.

Broaden the horizon out to 10 years, and the S&P 500 almost always rises over that timespan, with the decade following the 2000 dot-com bubble a notable exception. That's why the general rule of thumb is for investors not to have money in stocks that they'll need to use within the next few years.

"It can be a brutal combination when the market is experiencing volatility, no matter how common or how normal it may be," said Ross Mayfield, investment strategy analyst at Baird Pri-

vate Wealth Management. "In the end, one of the super powers of the individual investor is the ability to focus on the long-term."

Of course, this bout of volatility may be different than all the past ones.

The market has been shaky as investors rush to get ahead of moves by the Federal Reserve to shut off the support it's been pouring into the economy since the pandemic began. The Fed is likely to start raising short-term interest rates in March, among other moves that will make borrowing money less easy and leave less money sloshing around the economy.

The market has seen such rate-hike campaigns before, and they've been the cause of plenty of past 10% drops for the stock market.

Wall Street also already knows what it's like for the Fed to turn off the money printer it used to buy bonds to support the economy, and to then suck out some of those dollars sloshing around the economy. But never before has the Fed been doing both such things while a pandemic is still raging and inflation is at a nearly four-decade high. That's why many on Wall Street expect big swings to continue to shake the market, even if stocks have calmed down a bit in recent days. But that shouldn't come as a surprise to any investors in stocks. □

## Ford rides accounting gains, high prices to big 2021 profit

**DETROIT (AP)** — Ford Motor Co. reversed a loss and rode some big accounting changes to post a \$17.94 billion net profit last year, even as it battled computer chip shortages that caused factory slowdowns and vehicle shortages.

U.S. sales for the Dearborn, Michigan, automaker fell 7% for the year over depressed 2020 numbers. But customers paid record prices of nearly \$51,000 per vehicle in Ford's most lucrative market, according to Edmunds.com.

Excluding the one-time items such as the \$8.2 billion

reclassification of Ford's investment in electric vehicle startup Rivian, the company made \$1.59 per share, falling short of analyst estimates of \$1.86, according to FactSet. Revenue rose 7.2% to \$136.34 billion. That was short of analyst estimates of \$137.61 billion.

The company said it expects full-year pretax profits this year to rise 15% to 25% over 2021 numbers, to a range of \$11.5 billion to \$12.5 billion.

Chief Financial Officer John Lawler said Ford is seeing high demand for its products, but its factory output

was constrained last year by the semiconductor chip shortage and other supply-chain disruptions.

"It's the supply chains that limit what we could produce, what we could provide," he told reporters Thursday.

But Lawler warned that Ford faced increased commodity costs for materials such as aluminum, steel, precious metals and resins. Those costs increased \$3 billion last year, and Ford sees them rising another \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion this year.

"That is one of our key head-



This Oct. 25, 2011 file photo shows a Ford logo on the tailgate of a pick-up truck, and on a Ford dealership sign in Salem, N.H. Associated Press

winds that we're working through," he said. "It's pretty much across the board on all of our commodities."

Ford's net income reversed

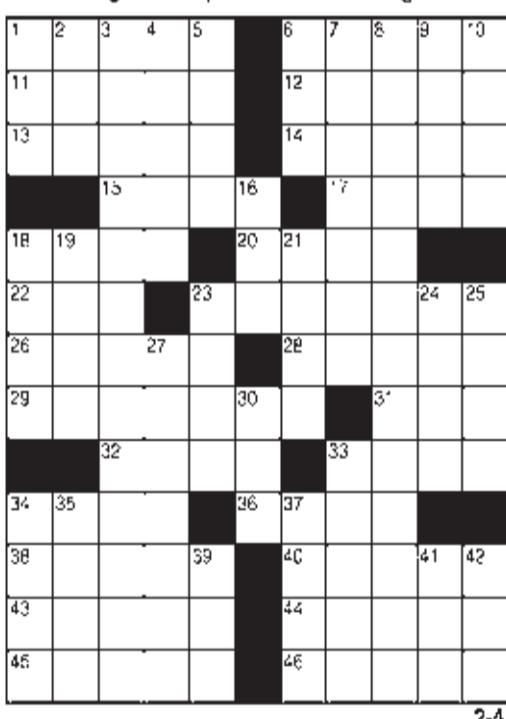
a loss of \$1.28 billion last year as it also dealt with a huge restructuring, a costly recall and a decline in the value of its pension fund. □

**CROSSWORD**

By THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS**

- 1 Turning tool  
6 Top roles  
11 Was sore  
12 Crowd scene actor  
13 Plow pioneer John  
14 Sales pitch  
15 Singer Mitchell  
17 Leave out  
18 Took turns  
20 Trick  
22 Unoriginal  
23 Library penalty  
26 Scoundrel  
28 Decorate  
29 Mascara holder  
31 Relieve  
32 "Auld Lang"—  
33 Iowa State setting  
34 Buddies  
36 Maintenance  
38 Wrong  
40 Usual values  
43 Stopwatch button  
44 Game show host  
45 Fidgety  
46 "Hondo" star

**Yesterday's answer**

A X Y D L B A A X R  
is L O N G E L L O W

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

2-4

**CRYPTOQUOTE**

OS FNNLOSK, JR OS JYY IGV

JCIR, ROPBYOFOIW OR IGV

ROKS NQ BV C Q V F L O N S .

— FDCSNSRLW

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: DON'T WORRY ABOUT WHAT'S COOL AND WHAT'S NOT COOL. AUTHENTICITY IS WHAT'S COOL. — ZAC POSEN

**Shares of Facebook parent Meta plunge 23% on lower profits**

Facebook employees take a photo with the company's new name and logo outside its headquarters in Menlo Park, Calif., on Oct. 28, 2021.

Associated Press

By BARBARA ORTUTAY

AP Technology Writer

Newly renamed Meta is investing heavily in its futuristic "metaverse" project, but for now, relies on advertising revenue for nearly all its income.

So when it posted sharply higher costs but gave a weak revenue forecast late Wednesday, investors got spooked and knocked almost \$200 billion off the valuation of the company formerly known as Facebook.

Meta's shares fell 22.9% to \$249.05 in after-hours trading. If the drop holds until the market opens Thursday, the company's overall value, known as its market capitalization, is on track to drop by a figure greater than the size of the entire Greek economy, based on data from the World Bank.

The metaverse is sort of the internet brought to life, or at least rendered in 3D. Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg has described it as a "virtual environment" in which you can immerse yourself instead of just staring at a screen.

Theoretically, the meta-

verse would be a place where people can meet, work and play using virtual reality headsets, augmented reality glasses, smartphone apps or other devices.

But building it is not likely to be cheap.

Meta invested more than \$10 billion in its Reality Labs segment which includes its virtual reality headsets and augmented reality technology in 2021, contributing to the quarter's profit decline. It expanded its workforce by 23%, ending the year with 71,970 employees, mostly in technical roles.

The company also said revenue in the current quarter is likely to come in below market expectations, due in part to growing competition from TikTok and other rival platforms vying for people's attention.

Sheryl Sandberg, Meta's chief operating officer, said in a conference call with analysts that global supply chain issues, labor shortages and earlier-than-usual holiday spending by advertisers put pressure on the company's advertising sales.

Another problem: Recent privacy changes by Apple make it harder for companies like Meta to track people for advertising purposes, which also puts pressure on the company's revenue. For months now, Meta has been warning investors that its revenue can't continue to grow at the breakneck pace they are accustomed to.

"It is time for a reality check on Meta's position for the metaverse," said Raj Shah, an analyst at the digital consulting firm Publicis Sapient. "The metaverse is a long way from being profitable or filling the gap in ad revenue after Apple's policy change."

People's changing online behavior is also limiting Meta's money-making abilities. More people are watching video, such as Instagram's Reels (a TikTok clone), and this makes less money than more established features. □

ARUBA TODAY

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Aruba Bank N.V. Acc.#332668  
Caribbean Mercantile Bank N.V.  
Acc.#23951903  
RBC Royal Bank Acc.#1330772

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**TODAY****HTTA**

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**HTTA**

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Fundacion Contra Violencia

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Centre for Diabetes

Tel. 524 8888

Child Abuse Prevention

Tel. 582 4433

Quota Club Tel. 525 2672

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Phone Directory Tel. 118



**How to reach us!**

The map shows the following streets and landmarks:

- Weststraat
- Scheepstraat
- Schelpstraat
- High Rise Hotel
- Waterstraat
- Royal Plaza Mall
- L.G. Smith Boulevard
- Caya G.F. Bellico Cross
- Caya G.J. Cross
- Downtown

A magnifying glass icon highlights the "TODAY BONDIA" sign located at the intersection of Scheepstraat and Waterstraat.

## Amazon's 'Reacher' brings character closer to author's book

By ALICIA RANCILIO

Associated Press

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Adaptations of books to film and television often take liberties or stray from the original text. Tom Cruise played Jack Reacher twice on film but didn't match the physical description of the character described by author Lee Child.

Child's Reacher is 6 foot, 5 inches tall. Cruise is under 6 feet.

A new Amazon Originals series "Reacher" has found an actor closer to the author's profile of the former U.S. Army officer who travels the country without a plan, but finds trouble wherever he goes.

Alan Ritchson, ("Titans," "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles") who stars as Reacher in the series, is 6 foot, 2 inches tall. In the series, his Reacher towers over just about everyone he meets and draws attention for his size wherever he goes. This Reacher is referred to regularly out loud by adjectives about his height, such as "giant" and "stretch."

Ritchson says he can relate to that and deals with "sizeism often" in his own life, describing his height and girth. "I took my son to a trampoline park with his friend recently and my son told me his friend said 'your dad has gotten fat,'" laughed Ritchson in a Zoom interview.



This image released by Amazon shows Alan Ritchson as Jack Reacher in a scene from the Amazon series "Reacher."

Associated Press

Where the TV Reacher strays from the books is with dialogue. "Reacher said nothing" is a common written phrase in the book, but Ritchson's Reacher, while an observer, speaks his mind.

"Lee Child in the books had the luxury of explaining what's going on inside Reacher's head," said Ritchson. "But that's a little tougher to adapt to the screen without literally having a narrator. So I think (showrunner) Nick Santora did an incredible job

of demonstrating how his mind works."

One of the actor's favorite parts of portraying Reacher is bringing to life how funny the character can be in the books.

"When you read the books, (the humor) is sometimes hidden between the lines, or you see it in the way that characters in the book sort of react uncomfortably to him, and he's comfortable in that space. I would laugh out loud reading the books. .. I wanted to make sure this show didn't take itself so

seriously that we miss that sense of humor," he said.

The debut season of "Reacher," premiering Friday, is based on "Killing Floor," the first book in the series.

"He's a minimalist," says Ritchson of the character. "The kind of guy that walks around with nothing but a toothbrush and a passport, but trouble finds him wherever he goes. So he just happens to stumble into circumstances. He arrives off a bus in a small town in Georgia and is immediate-

ly arrested for murder when he shows up, and he basically has to solve his own case."

Willa Fitzgerald and Malcolm Goodwin play local authorities who team up with Reacher in the investigation. The hope is that future seasons will follow where Reacher goes and who he encounters.

"It feels a little bit like an anthology where Reacher remains the centerpiece and those vibrant, interesting characters that orbit him change and the settings change."

Ritchson says he's well-aware that the role comes with a responsibility to please the fans.

"There are a lot of people that were right for this and wanted to do this," Ritchson said. "

There's a chip on my shoulder to prove every day I show up to work that I am the right guy, and they made the right choice."

To prepare, he made a point to read all the Jack Reacher books and soon became a devotee. (There are 26 books in Child's series.)

"As I read each book, I couldn't wait to get to the next one. I think I'm on par with the super fans out there. I really wanted to get every detail right, and I want to honor this character." □

## 'Ozark's' Jason Bateman feted as Hasty Pudding Man of Year



Actor Jason Bateman arrives at a special screening of "Ozark" Season 2 at Arclight Hollywood on Thursday, Aug. 23, 2018, in Los Angeles.

Associated Press

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (AP) — "Ozark" actor Jason Bat-

eman is being feted as 2022 Man of the Year by Harvard University's Hasty Pudding Theatricals.

Thursday evening's festivities will mark the first time the award has been presented since the coronavirus pandemic began in 2020.

The "Arrested Development" star also produced and directed "Ozark," a popular Netflix series. He's the 55th recipient of the theater troupe's coveted pudding pot.

The last Man of the Year was Ben Platt in 2020. Past recipients include Clint Eastwood, Tom Hanks,

Robert De Niro and Samuel L. Jackson. The 2022 Woman of the Year, Jennifer Garner, will be honored Saturday.

Bateman, 52, earned a Primetime Emmy for outstanding directing in a drama in 2020 for "Ozark," two SAG awards for acting in "Ozark," and a best actor Golden Globe in 2005 for his portrayal of Michael Bluth in "Arrested Development."

Bateman, whose acting career dates to the early 1980s, has appeared in multiple television shows and starred in several films including the "Horrible

Bosses" movies, "Game Night," and "Identity Thief."

At age 18, he became the Directors Guild of America's youngest director for directing three episodes of "Valerie," according to Hasty Pudding Theatricals, which dates to 1844 and calls itself the third oldest theater group in the world. The Man of the Year Award has been handed out since 1967, and the Woman of the Year Award was established in 1951.

The awards recognize people who have made lasting and impressive contributions to the world of entertainment. □

## Report: Mickelson accuses PGA Tour of 'obnoxious greed'

**KING ABDULLAH ECONOMIC CITY, Saudi Arabia (AP)**

— Phil Mickelson claims the "obnoxious greed" of the PGA Tour and its ownership of media rights is why players are tempted by the prospects of rival tours, such as one backed by Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, Golf Digest reported.

Mickelson, Bryson DeChambeau and Dustin Johnson are among 20 PGA Tour members who are playing in the Saudi International this week for exorbitant appearance money.

The tournament is now part of the Asian Tour, which received a \$300 million influx from Greg Norman's new LIV Golf Investments, which is funded primarily by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund.

Mickelson, a 45-time winner on the PGA Tour, and DeChambeau have been the two most prominent players linked to talk of a "super league." Players such as Jon Rahm, Rory McIlroy, Brooks Koepka and Jordan Spieth have said they would not be interested.

In a news conference before the tournament, Mickelson said the competition was giving players leverage, and that the threat of a rival league had led the PGA Tour to create a



Phil Mickelson hits his tee shot on the fifth hole of the South Course at Torrey Pines during the first round of the Farmers Insurance Open golf tournament, Wednesday Jan. 26, 2022, in San Diego.

Associated Press

\$40 million Player Impact Program (which he says he won last year) and increases in prize money and FedEx Cup bonus money. He later told Golf Digest the players not owning their media rights is what bothers him.

"If the tour wanted to end any threat, they could just hand back the media rights to the players," Mickelson told Digest. "But they would rather throw \$25 million here and \$40 million there than give back the roughly

\$20 billion in digital assets they control. Or give up access to the \$50-plus million they make every year on their own media channel."

He did not say where he came up with the \$20 billion figure.

The PGA Tour declined comment. The tour, like other major sports organizations, relies on media rights as a major source of revenue.

"The media rights are but a small fraction of everything else," Mickelson said.

"And it is the tour's obnoxious greed that has really opened the door for opportunities elsewhere."

Mickelson was irritated in 2018 when he staged a winner-take-all exhibition match with Tiger Woods in Las Vegas. That was the first of five matches, and Mickelson said he has had to pay \$1 million to the tour for each one.

"For my own media rights," Mickelson said. "That type of greed is, to me, beyond obnoxious."

However, that arrangement has long been standard for unofficial events on television such as the old Skins Game or the Monday night matches involving Woods from 20 years ago.

Mickelson also mentioned to Golf Digest that someone wanted to use a seven-second clip from a shot he hit out of the pine straw to the 13th green at the 2010 Masters. He said the charge was \$30,000 per second every time the clip was aired for a total cost of \$3.5 million. Augusta National, not the PGA Tour, owns those media rights.

Norman this week announced two of the proposed 10 new events on the Asian Tour in Thailand and England, the latter held a week before the U.S. Open. He has not talked specifically about a super league, nor has he announced any players who are willing to join.

The Daily Mail, without citing sources or terms, reported DeChambeau was offered \$135 million to join such a league.

"I'm not sure how this is going to play out," said Mickelson, the reigning PGA champion who turns 52 in June. "My ultimate loyalty is to the game of golf and what it has given me. □

## EEOC wants to join women's team players in equal pay appeal

**SAN FRANCISCO (AP)**—The

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has asked for permission to participate in the appeal by American women soccer players trying to reinstate their pay claim against the U.S. Soccer Federation.

The EEOC asked the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on Thursday to be allowed to address the court during oral arguments scheduled for March 7 in Pasadena, California.

The EEOC said the players' lawyers had agreed to cede four minutes of their 20-minute time allotment before the three-judge panel. The USSF said it did not oppose the use of the players' time.

Women's team players sued the federation in March 2019 under the Equal Pay Act, claiming they had not been paid equitably under their collective bargaining agreement compared to what the men's team received under its agreement.

U.S. District Judge R. Gary Klausner granted a summary judgment to the federation on the pay claim, and the sides settled the portion of the suit alleging discriminatory working conditions. "This case raises the important question of how to analyze the rate of pay under the EPA when there are multiple forms of salary, as well as the proper analysis of a discriminatory pay

claim," the EEOC said. The USSF says it has offered identical deals to the unions for the women and the men, but the unions are not obligated under federal law to negotiate similar terms.

"U.S. Soccer remains committed to equal pay for our senior national team players and ensuring that they remain among the highest paid in the world," the USSF said in a statement. "We believe the 9th Circuit will affirm the district court's decision to dismiss the pay discrimination claims."

Players welcomed the government intervention.

"The EEOC," spokeswoman Molly Levinson said in a statement, "thinks it is cry-



United States' Alex Morgan jumps over Netherlands' goalkeeper Sari van Veenendaal as she attempts to score during a women's quarterfinal soccer match at the 2020 Summer Olympics, Friday, July 30, 2021, in Yokohama, Japan.

Associated Press

tal clear that USSF — led by Carlos Cordeiro and Cindy Parlow Cone — has discriminated against the players and wants to tell the court about it." □

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## Analysis: No Tom Brady, NFL in good hands with young QBs

By ROB MAADDI

AP Pro Football Writer

Tom Brady spent time chatting with Joe Burrow in his last interview before announcing his retirement.

Consider it passing the torch.

Saying there will never be another Brady is no exaggeration. He won seven Super Bowls, owns nearly every passing record, and set an unparalleled level of excellence for more than two decades before walking away still at the top of his game at age 44.

But despite losing the quarterback widely considered the greatest of all time, the NFL has plenty of young stars ready to fill the void.

Burrow gets the first crack at winning the first post-Brady Super Bowl when he leads the Cincinnati Bengals against the Los Angeles Rams next week.

The ultra-cool, super confident, 25-year-old Burrow joined Brady on his SiriusXM podcast Monday night.

"I don't know if I can be in the conversation with this



New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady celebrates with the Vince Lombardi Trophy after the NFL Super Bowl XLIX football game against the Seattle Seahawks Sunday, Feb. 1, 2015, in Glendale, Ariz. The Patriots won 28-24.

Associated Press

guy yet, but I'm going to work really hard to try, and I think we're off to a great start and I'm really excited about the opportunity we

have," Burrow said.

Brady, who led the Tampa Bay Buccaneers to a Super Bowl title last season, fell two wins short of getting a

shot to repeat. He was effusive in his praise of Burrow. "I think Joe has some tools that I didn't quite have when I was his age, so super

impressed by how he's kinda come into the league, went to Cincinnati—which has been a tough place to play over the years—and two years into his career, after a really tough injury last year, showed a lot of mental and physical toughness coming back and having an incredible season," Brady said.

"I always love watching quarterbacks, certainly young quarterbacks, because I feel like there's certain ways to play the game and to play the game at a high level requires a huge commitment. And I think Joe, even when I saw him at LSU, he makes that commitment. It's a great thing for me to see as someone who has played this game for a long time. Really happy for Joe and his team."

Burrow, the No. 1 overall pick in 2020, made a remarkable comeback from ACL surgery during his rookie season to lead the Bengals to an AFC North title and first Super Bowl appearance in 33 years. □

## Federer, Nadal plan to play Laver Cup in London in September



Rafael Nadal of Spain embraces the Norman Brookes Challenge Cup after defeating Daniil Medvedev of Russia in the men's singles final at the Australian Open tennis championships in Melbourne, Australia, early Monday, Jan. 31, 2022.

Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal both say they will play in the next edition of the Laver Cup.

Federer, who has been sidelined since July because of an injured knee, and Nadal, fresh off earning his men's-record 21st Grand Slam title at the Australian Open, said in a statement Thursday they will represent Team Europe in London on Sept. 23-25. "I'm really looking forward to getting back into competition later this year and Laver Cup is very much part of my plan," said Federer, whose management com-

pany founded the competition.

Federer said Nadal messaged him last year suggesting they play doubles together again in the Laver Cup. They teamed up to win a doubles match during the first Laver Cup in 2017.

"If we're able to possibly share the court one more time as a doubles pairing, then this would be a truly special experience for us both at this stage in our careers," Nadal said.

This will be the fifth Laver Cup. Neither Federer nor Nadal took part in 2021.

Federer, 40, has not com-

peted since undergoing surgery on his right knee for the third time in 1 1/2 years not long after losing in the Wimbledon quarterfinals on July 7. In November, he said he did not expect to be able to play at the All England Club this year and it is still uncertain when—or, truly, if—he will return to Grand Slam action.

Nadal, Federer and Novak Djokovic all were tied at 20 major championships until Sunday. That's when Nadal moved ahead by coming back after dropping the opening two sets to beat Daniil Medvedev in the final at Melbourne Park. □